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President Backs CIA in Viet Nam

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

By Marguerite Higgins
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

WASHINGTON.

President Kennedy yesterday rejected as "wholly untrue" persistent rumors that the Central Intelligence Agency had done some free wheeling in South Viet Nam. On the contrary, the President said, the agency has been doing "a good job."

The President was responding to speculation about alleged insubordination of the CIA, arising in part from the reported transfer from Saigon of John Richardson, the agency's director there.

In troubled South Viet Nam, 13 American service men were almost certainly dead after plane and helicopter crashes in a mountainous jungle area 380 miles north of Saigon. It was the worst U. S. disaster in the bitter struggle against the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas.

Mr. Kennedy singled out Mr. Richardson as a "dedicated public servant." The President said he had personally gone over the CIA record in Viet Nam for the past nine months and had satisfied himself that the agency had "never done anything but support" Washington's policy there.

The President also did his emphatic best to close the books on press reports from Saigon and Washington that policy rifts within the Administration are continuing.

"There is no disagreement," the President said, among top officials of the Pentagon, the CIA and the State Department on our basic policy, in the wake of the McNamara-Taylor mission to Viet Nam.

This policy is to get on with the war and rely on diplomacy and persuasion—rather than on a coup d'etat—to bring about liberalization of President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime.

The President conceded that there had been no substantive changes in Viet Nam since his TV interview a month ago in which he called for "changes in policies and perhaps personnel", inside Viet Nam.

It is authoritatively learned that the White House and the State Department have come to regret that statement, because it publicly placed impossible demands on Mr. Diem to bow to American pressure and because it attempted unrealistically to compel President Diem to fire his closest adviser, his younger brother, Counselor Ngo Dinh Nhu.

Until the President's press conference, the CIA had taken the position that Mr. Richardson merely had been called "home for consultations." But at his conference the President used the term "transfer," indicating that the decision to move Mr. Richardson out of Saigon had been taken.

The reasons have not been spelled out publicly. But privately officials state that they have to do in part with the advent of a new and tougher phase in American policies toward Viet Nam.

Mr. Richardson, officially listed as First Secretary of the U. S. Embassy in Saigon, had been identified with the previous Kennedy administration policy, of seeking to establish the most friendly relations with the Diem regime. Previous attempts to liberalize the regime were—on Washington orders—done directly through diplomatic channels.

Washington's confidence in this policy was badly shaken when, despite U. S. pressure, the Diem regime on Aug. 21 raided and smashed up pagodas and arrested Buddhist leaders [illegible] vigorous anti-Diem campaign.

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Since these and other repressive measures instituted by Mr. Diem in August, the Administration has shifted to policies of overt public pressure, including a slowdown of certain types of economic aid.

It would be logical therefore, officials argue, to replace Mr. Richardson with a new official whose appointment would in itself bring home to the Diem regime the change in Washington policy.

In South Viet Nam's highland jungles and in 13 American homes 9,000 miles away, the real, always lonely war for the future of this Southeast Asian nation spoke for itself yesterday.

Missing and almost certainly dead in the worst U. S. disaster since President Kennedy ordered all-out military support for Ngo Dinh Diem's fight against the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas are 13 American service men, lost in plane and helicopter crashes in the jungle near Da Nang, 380 miles north of Saigon.

Three Vietnamese soldiers were also killed, and an American and a Vietnamese injured in a bizarre series of events which turned a rescue mission into a tragedy.

The disaster brought to 128 the toll of Americans lost in the struggle which Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor predicted last week may be brought near a successful conclusion by the end of 1965.

More than 14,000 U. S. military advisers are in South Viet Nam, and Secretary McNamara and Gen. Taylor said some of these might even be withdrawn by Christmas this year, if all goes well.

It didn't go well in the past two days.

The disaster began late Tuesday when U. S. Air Force Capt. Dean A. Wadsworth, of Cotulle, Tex., an "adviser" who was piloting a T-28 bomber-fighter because of a shortage of Vietnamese personnel, went on a dive-bombing raid on a Communist stronghold in the mountainous jungle near the Laotian border.

Capt. Wadsworth's plane crashed and exploded and he and a Vietnamese companion apparently died instantly. The U. S. military command, informed of the crash by eyewitnesses in other craft, sent out two Marine helicopters at dusk Tuesday on the outside chance that the men were somehow still alive.

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